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WHO'S FOR WORK? THE MANAGEMENT OF LABOUR IN THE PROCESS OF ACCUMULATION IN THREE ADJA VILLAGES, BENIN

Jan H. B. den Ouden

INTRODUCTION

The problem of labour

The world of the Adja in south-west Bénin is strongly influenced by processes of commercialisation, by the monetisation of goods and services and by incorporation into the state, but at the same time the cultural and structural past is still very much a part of the present. Both old and new patterns of labour management play an important role in the ways enterprises expand or decline.¹ In this article I shall analyse the styles and the more personal strategies used in the process of accumulation, focusing especially on the management of labour and the problems of mobilising and keeping labour that costs less than the value of what it produces. Labour is one of the essential factors limiting scope for economic manoeuvre. The need for labour is very high in agriculture, commerce, transport and handicrafts, and it is crucial to the economic survival and expansion of enterprises, since many activities are so labour-intensive. There are no tractors or ploughs in use;² transport, from the often very scattered fields to the road and, in the case of food crops and processed products, from the road to the market, is very time-consuming.

I shall restrict myself mostly to discussing qualitatively the styles and strategies used in handling labour. This means that I cannot fully explain the labour situation, let alone predict future developments. To understand fully what is going on we would need information about, for instance, the past and present prices of agricultural products, the availability of alternative employment in Bénin and neighbouring countries, and the nature and local effects of national and international intervention as well as changes in the exchange rates between the West African franc (CFA) and other currencies such as the Nigerian naira. In the life-worlds of individuals and social groups the external factors which confront people are mediated and transformed by them. This suggests that those remote forces have already been somehow taken into account in the behaviour and strategies of the individuals and groups (compare Long, 1992: 20). But for a full understanding of 'the conditions that constrain choice and strategy' (Long, 1992: 38), it would be good, if difficult, to have a more thorough and systematic knowledge of the outside world. This article, then, is necessarily only an anthropological, actor-oriented study, in which I try to look at the behaviour of people, and to listen to their arguments, in an attempt, from a bottom-up rather than top-down perspective, to describe order in a very heterogeneous reality (compare Long, 1989: 231; 1992: 20–1, 33–4).

People themselves discuss the labour problem in terms of, for instance, children who are increasingly reluctant to work for their fathers and

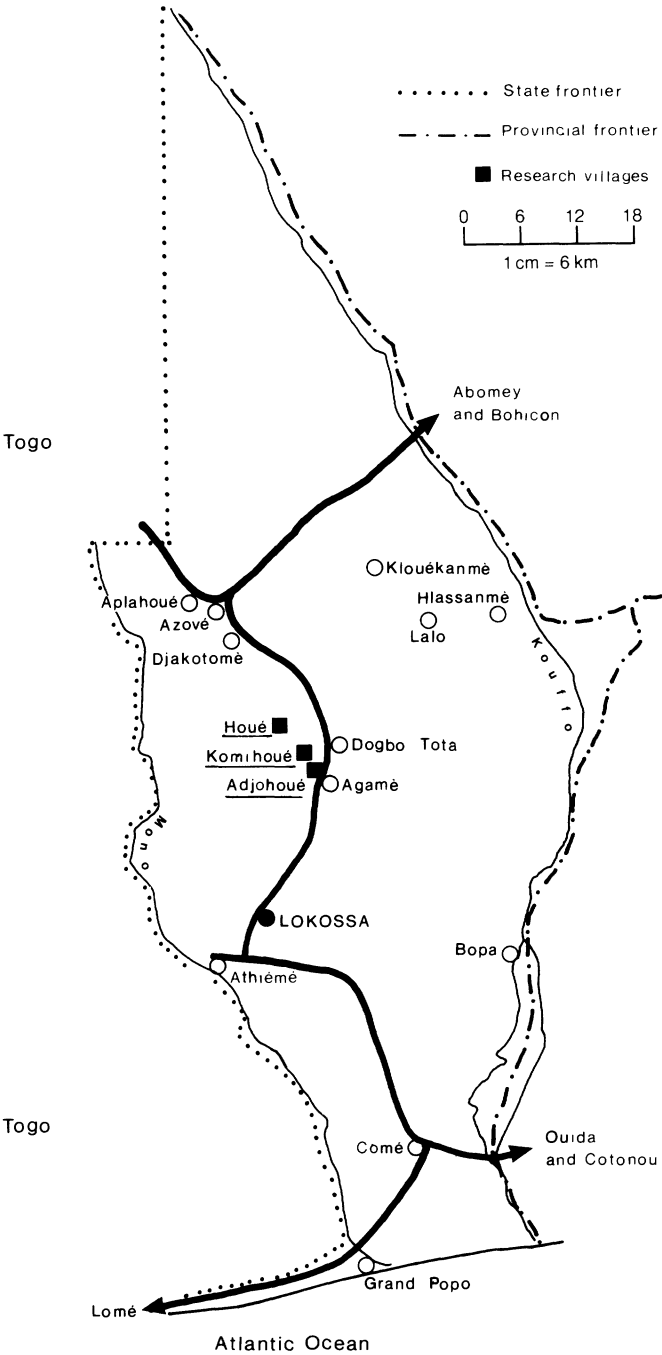


FIG. 1. Mono Province, Republic of Bénin

mothers, and the cost and the difficulties of employing wage labour. As we shall see, some informants go beyond complaining; they are ready to discuss different styles of labour mobilisation and what they consider to be the good and bad points of each style. Some men explicitly favour the old model of having many wives and children, in that way creating a considerable labour force; others deny that this style is successful and say that it is better to restrict the size of your family and work mainly with wage labour. These reflections on past and present experiences in solving the labour problem and on the best way of doing things is not restricted only to people working in agriculture. We find that men handling multiple enterprises and people who are now (or were formerly) active in trade and transport make the same points and have the same differences of opinion.

Broadly speaking, there are two styles of labour management somewhat comparable with what Cheater (1984: 98–114) calls 'the traditional idiom of accumulation' (polygynists working with domestic labour) and 'the modern idiom of accumulation' (monogamists working with hired labour).³ Both groups try to expand their enterprises, but in different ways; these styles allow of even more personal strategies. In studying these styles of labour management in the process of accumulation, we have to consider what people's ideas are and in what way they think about accumulation and those who accumulate. We find that the two styles I mentioned are related to two distinct types of *ewa adoku*, 'blessed people'. On the one hand there are the *alo-su amè dji*, powerful men who control many people and who are respected and feared. They have many wives, children and dependents in their compounds, but there are also many others, especially in their cognatic kin group, who are their followers and come to them for advice and support. If you want to do something special, you first consult them and ask for their approval and blessing. I know high officials who never travel abroad without informing and consulting the important *alo-su amè dji* from their kin group in their village of origin. 'If you don't, they can hurt you even when you are in Europe, and most certainly when you come back.' This is to say that these old-style big men are at the same time *azéto* or *enouvon wato*, people with special powers, who are initiated and expert in the use of sorcery. They can protect you against evil, but they can also curse you. They are not primarily interested in material wealth—though they are never really poor—but they want to dominate people. This category of accumulator is associated with the first, old style of labour management.

A 'big man' of this type is quite different from those labelled *eho wu amè*, 'money more important than people', to whom wealth is much more important than a big following. They are not concerned to settle conflicts, arrange marriages, invest in people, 'they are not interested in their community'. They may be feared because of their individualism or their business dealings, but not because of sorcery. Normally they are people of middle age trying to increase their business profits. They do not help others to attract followers but prefer, for instance, to grant loans on the security of land which in the end they will take over. They will even name a son Howamè (Money before men) or Howanou (Money, maker of beautiful things) and a daughter Hoyigbé (Money buys people). In general they put more emphasis on formal education (*chercher une fortune dans le papier*) than do the

alo-su amè dji. To complete the picture, I should add that in the Adja world people know of another kind of accumulator, termed *asso wa eho bo*; translated freely, it means 'to sacrifice someone to become rich', to get wealth by selling a person to a secret society (compare Ouden, 1987: 18–19). Adja will normally deny possessing such power—to find them, they say, you should first look among the Yoruba of eastern Bénin and Nigeria.

In concluding this outline of the indigenous cultural categories of *ewa adoku*, 'blessed people' or 'accumulators', we need to add that most people, including the old, belong to the *de-do hlonhlon*, the people who have no power. Here, of course, we also find men who have only one or two wives and a small number of children. But they are not would-be accumulators with strategies comparable to those of the *eho wu amè*; the latter purposely take care that only a few have claims upon them and ensure that their property passes to only a limited number of descendants. The *de-do hlonhlon* are simply unimportant.

As this article will make clear, people's categorisation of accumulators in terms of *alo-su amè dji* and *eho wu amè* is too simple to represent reality. Many accumulators who would like to have the status of *alo-su amè dji* now also try to increase their material wealth, while among the *eho wu amè* there is a wide range of types. In what follows I shall not attempt to speculate as to exactly where particular entrepreneurs stand on this continuum. Nonetheless it is clear that the image people want to present (to themselves as well as to others) has an important impact on the styles and strategies they follow in the process of accumulation and in their management of labour/people.

Though the Adja as an ethnic group were acephalous, without hereditary chiefs, they were not egalitarian, either in ideology or in practice.⁴ Their political position was very insecure, given the slave raiding and their location between the kingdom of Dahomey to the north-east and the European trading centres on the coast, and therefore called for strong leaders with considerable followings at the level of the *hennu* (a type of residential patri-lineage). One could perhaps speak of egalitarianism and point to the importance of achievement in becoming a 'big man'. There were no rules of succession, and it was—is—never possible to predict which younger men have the courage, perseverance and persuasive power to move out, assemble a following and become successful; nor was it simple to pick out which of the sons were sufficiently strong and inspire enough confidence to take over from a dead or ageing father. It was not an easy task: to marry a large number of women, have many children, and keep them all feeling secure; to ensure there is not too much illness and there are not too many deaths, no attacks of sorcery or witchcraft, no losses from slave raids, yet at the same time always to have sufficient reserves to survive bad harvests. A man who would be a 'big man' had to attract more kin—from his mother's side, for example, or from the kin of his wives—as well as drawing in strangers; he would also supplement his force with slaves (whose position ultimately was not very different from that of other dependants). Only in that way could a man create a strong and respected *hennu*.

Accumulation, then, referred in the olden days to people, food, huts and the fencing of land; it was not oriented towards financial profits from the sale of

produce. With time the picture has gradually changed, particularly since 1925, when the infrastructure of roads and bridges improved. First palm oil and then other agricultural produce and the new export crops acquired monetary value; locally run commerce and transport began to take off. But, to earn money, land as well as people is needed. Land became a scarce commodity. Originally both newcomers and local people would acquire it by giving a present to the man and the family that controlled the area concerned, but this practice was gradually superseded by buying and selling, which by the 1940s had become the normal way (Ouden, 1986: 58). This commoditisation of land resulted from increasing population density, accentuated by immigration from the northern parts of Mono province and by demand for land on the part of expanding enterprises seeking to grow annual crops like maize and cotton and to plant oil palms and, more recently, teak wood.

A vital factor now in cost-benefit calculations—besides land (or, in commerce and transport, other capital assets)—is the problem of how to get a sufficient supply of cheap, reliable and controllable labour. Using only wage labour is almost impossible in view of the prices of the factors of production, the market prices which people are getting for their produce, and the present productivity of labour. The availability of permanent wage labour is also limited because workers can start small enterprises of their own as sharecroppers or on temporary loans of land. It must be remembered that sharecropping (like farming loaned land, to some extent) is a mechanism whereby owners of the means of production acquire access to others' labour (Swindell, 1985: 109, referring to R. Pearce; Hüsken, 1989: 324). On the other hand even more trouble can come from trying to use old-style methods and expanding the enterprise by seeking to extract a surplus from wives, children and other dependants when the costs and benefits of this type of non-commoditised labour come to be calculated. As Hart (1975: 27) puts it, '... kinsmen might feel cheated of the legitimate rewards for their co-operation and labour'. In other words, there is friction when 'big men' who to some extent still act as, and advocate the values of, *alo-su amè dji* want to use their control over people to make profits for purely material investment and to increase their own personal standard of living. In that situation the principle of redistribution is severely undermined, and dependants and followers feel disappointed and deceived—the old values, they think, have decayed.

Here I want to point to a special effect that the growing of certain crops can have on changing domestic relations. Cotton is sold via the state development organisation CARDER and virtually paid for in a single instalment. Accumulators use the money to pay off debts and to invest in, for example, the buying of land. As one informant, half-way between *alo-su amè dji* and *eho wu amè*, put it, 'You should never have much money at home; your family will eat it.' Wives, sons and other dependants often do not see much benefit coming to them from this sudden influx of money and, if such is the case, it gives rise to hard feelings about the lack of redistribution. By contrast, earnings from sources other than cotton are usually spread out much more evenly over the year.

The growing difficulty of working with family labour (compare Swindell, 1985: 53–4; 80–90) is connected with the erosion of authority and old values

within the domestic units. In addition there is the (often over-optimistic) possibility of starting your own business in agriculture or some other trade in or beyond the district. Furthermore, rapidly rising expectations of a higher standard of living make it difficult for young men (and, to a much lesser extent, young women) to accept a prolonged 'apprenticeship' with low or moderate rates of return.⁵ In short, Adja men who try to expand their enterprises, or are merely trying to sustain them at their present level, are facing the dilemma of a disintegrating family labour force and, at the same time, insufficient (near-) proletarianisation of large numbers of people. As a result they have considerable problems in finding (and retaining) cheap, reliable and controllable labour. To overcome the dilemma, entrepreneurs are resorting to a number of different styles and strategies of labour management.

In the three villages where I did my research⁶ I selected for in-depth study certain agnatic families and sometimes the whole of some small wards. To get a better understanding of the processes of socio-economic success and failure past and present, I usually took as my starting point the patrilineal grandfathers of the current elders of these families. From the grandfathers, long since dead, I tried to trace all the male descendants who had reached adulthood as well as the wives to whom they were married. In this way I came to know about a large number of men and women, many already dead, irrespective of whether they had remained in the village or had emigrated temporarily or permanently.⁷ Though the research topics were not exactly the same for all three villages—the study of Houé village in 1986, for example, focused mainly on land tenure—much information was collected about the rise and fall of enterprises and the ways in which labour was or was not successfully attracted. Here I shall refer only to some of my case material in discussing the labour situation. The first case study focuses on a family seeking to accumulate wealth mainly through agriculture; the second analyses a multiple enterprise, and in the third I look at a family of (ex-) traders. The fourth lays out the evidence for there being very poor and near-proletarianised people in the district. In the overview I add some further case material to the discussion of the management of labour.

The setting

Each of the three villages had a very different socio-economic ambience. I started with a 'very poor' village, continued with what was considered to be a 'wealthy' village with a flourishing agriculture, and finished with a village where it was assumed that many people were engaged in commercial activity. I shall give a brief impression of these villages, all of them near the regional centre of Dogbo Tota.

Houé, studied in 1986, is an old village inhabited mainly by members of the ethnic sub-group of Dogbo Adja. Most of these people make a very 'tired' impression: few families show any dynamism in economic life. Indeed, what is striking is how disintegrated the family structure is. Both within families and between families there is much envy, aggression (in the form of accusations of sorcery) and attempts at doing down anyone who tries to accumulate some assets. It seems that many families in Houé realised too late that they had lost far too much of their land to Houé newcomers,

especially those in Koffihoué ward and in the village of Komihoué (see the cases of the Dosson and the Kpèkpè families). Now many Houé families are marginalised or even proletarianised. Since they have failed to develop new sources of income, many people (women as well as men) have to earn a living working as day labourers for those who own the land that was once theirs.⁸

The village studied in 1989, Komihoué, was founded about 1850 on land belonging to families of the first village, Houé, and is inhabited by Ehoué Adja from the north of Mono province. Stereotypically (but several cases show it to be true), in their families relations of authority and subordination are stricter than among the Dogbo Adja, and in general they are notably hard workers on the farms.⁹

In 1991 a Chikpi Adja from Adjohoué made the following remark when I confronted him with the fact that the people of Komihoué were doing much better in agriculture than he and his fellow villagers: 'But they're Ehoué who work like hell at farming. And they're fools, too: they allow themselves to be exploited by merchants and by the state. Even when prices are far too low they go on producing year after year. What's more, they don't send their children to school and they force their women to do weeding for them without any payment.'

In Komihoué we find some important agricultural entrepreneurs, and there are also some dynamic young men starting up in farming; they are still buying large tracts of land from people of the old Dogbo Adja villages, not least, certainly, from people in Houé. The Komihoué world is far from harmonious. Accusations of sorcery are rife, while rival factions compete over agricultural output (among other things) and who will win the national prizes for being the best farmer. I do not want to suggest that everybody in Komihoué is well-to-do; in at least one of the three wards, people are generally much less prosperous.

The third village, Adjohoué, is a Chikpi Adja village, also founded about the middle of the nineteenth century. Here the weak relations of authority within families and the individualism of husbands, wives and older children remind us of the Dogbo Adja. However, Adjohoué differs from Houé in that commercial activities have started to take priority and for a relatively significant section of the male and female population form an important alternative source of income to agriculture. This trend is associated with a relatively high standard of education (compare Kennedy, 1988–90: 175) and with successful migration within Bénin and abroad. The emphasis on commercial activities does not derive from a shortage of land: people thought they would get much higher profits from trade and transport, and in any case many do not like farm work. In Adjohoué there is far less factionalism and there are fewer accusations of sorcery in the village. Indeed, they say in Komihoué that Adjohoué men 'even if their wives are stolen, will still have a friendly drink with their opponents'.

From these few remarks about the three villages it should be clear that there are several factors accounting for the differences in response to incorporation into the 'modern' market, the state, and today's communication networks. The various ethnic sub-groups differ, it seems, in cultural traits

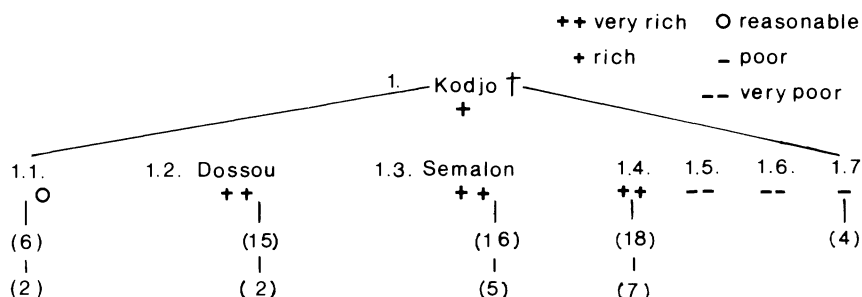


FIG. 2. Male members of the Kodjo/Dossou family. Total number of male descendants shown in parentheses

which have an economic impact—in their *Wirtschaftsgesinnung*—such as the strictness of familial authority, their expectations, and view of rights and duties within marriage,¹⁰ in how they value particular occupations and economic activities and in the importance they attach to delayed consumption and the need for continued investment (Ouden, 1989: 3–4). But there is also a geographical factor to be taken into account. Though all three villages are some 6–10 km from the market and administrative centre of Dogbo Tota, the first, Houé, is very much at a disadvantage because of its poor access to the north–south trunk road, a factor which could have influenced development since 1925, when cars first reached Dogbo Tota by that route (Ouden, 1991: 23, 28–9). But the difference in situation cannot account for the obvious differences between the villages of Komihoué (with its agriculture and scant regard for school education) and Adjohoué (with its commerce and considerable interest in schooling and careers outside the village). Thus, in discussing the styles and strategies of (would-be) accumulators, there are factors the influence and importance of which are very difficult to trace and evaluate. Furthermore, in the management of labour we are often left with cultural traits and with developments that are specific to particular groups of people; their causes are lost in history and cannot be readily explained.

SOLVING OR NOT SOLVING THE LABOUR PROBLEM: SOME CASES FROM HOUÉ, KOMIHOUE AND ADJÔHOUE

The Dossou family: agricultural entrepreneurship

Dossou, still a strong man even at the age of about 65 in 1989, belongs to the famous Kodjo family of Komihoué (Ouden, 1990: 41–53). The family consists of three big and wealthy farmers, a brother who is doing all right and three very poor brothers. However, people such as government officials and others not intimately acquainted with the village know only the three important brothers. As this group of seven brothers is too large and complex to be discussed in detail, I shall concentrate upon Dossou, and refer to his six brothers and their families only as necessary.

The key characteristics of Komihoué village is the intense, even ‘deadly’, competition between a number of big entrepreneurs and their families;

involved, too, are some minor but quite prosperous families who are doing well under the protection of the major families. The competition is not merely local but is carried on also at the regional and provincial levels. Here I want to emphasise that these rivalries are important; they cannot be neglected if we are able to understand the economic 'take-off' (and occasional subsequent crash) of a number of entrepreneurs in Komihoué.

How much land Dossou owns is a complete mystery, not only because he wants to hide the exact amount but also because in this region people know their fields but not usually their size. On the basis of information given by Dossou and his brothers, and from data from the state development organisation and extension service, I estimated his property to be about 80 ha.

I know that the seven brothers each inherited twelve *katchi* from their father; 17.4 *katchi* = 1 ha. Dossou and the other two elder brothers got twenty *katchi* extra because after their father's death they had become the guardians of their younger brothers and sisters. In addition land was assigned to the three eldest brothers by their father during his lifetime because they had worked long and hard for him. The younger brothers state that, at their father's death, Dossou started with fifty-five *katchi* (about 3 ha). They tell how, by the time they had been working for him for many years, Dossou had increased his holdings to some 360 *katchi* (about 21 ha). During this time Dossou already owned a profitable plant for distilling *sodabi* from palm wine. It is clear, however, that he employed his younger brothers under an informal (non-commoditised) arrangement in order to increase profits.

By employing his younger brothers and a considerable number of other members of both his cognatic family and his wives' families, as well as other 'strangers' attached to his household (these people were later paid off—liberated—with bridewealth for a wife and with a gift of land), Dossou was able to bridge the period when a large enough labour force was not available from within his own polygynous household. In 1989 Dossou was farming with six sons, four male 'strangers' attached to the household, three daughters, six girls (also 'strangers') and eleven wives, including two wives of 'non-liberated' sons. Moreover he could mobilise eighteen men (one son and seventeen 'strangers') who, though 'liberated', were still to some extent dependent on him because, for instance, he had lent them land free of rent in money or in kind.

In 1989 six sons aged between 14 and 28 years worked with Dossou in agriculture; two of these sons were married. One son, with some school education, worked as a labourer in a state agricultural enterprise north-west of Lokossa, three were apprentices in Cotonou and Lokossa, and one son, about 18 years old, attended secondary school in Lokossa. Dossou's eldest son, about 34 years old, who had grown up in the household of Dossou's eldest brother and was 'liberated' by this brother, is now more or less independent.

On his 80 ha of land Dossou manages with this work force to grow about 12 ha of annual crops (maize, cotton, peppers, etc.). The rest of his land does not need much labour: 40 ha of oil palm forests are cleaned up in November–December with the help of a number of 'Houénou', seasonal

workers from the north of the province, while his small plantations of cocoa, oranges, teak, etc. (in total, 7 ha), are worked mainly by people who have had temporary loans of land from him. Dossou's fields are scattered, though there is one plot of about 10 ha. 'I buy fields everywhere. I can because I've got enough people to supervise them and prevent thefts.' Distant plots of land are given out as temporary loans to dependants; Dossou plants oil palms in these fields, and when the palms grow large the cultivator has to leave.

Dossou refuses to use hired labourers on a regular basis: 'Working with your own people is more secure and needs less control'. He tries to follow his father's model in not giving his sons their independence even if he has already paid for their marriages.

For example, Hoto, 25 years old in 1989, never went to school and is still a dependant in his father's household. He married in 1985, the bridewealth being paid by his father; he has one little son and a daughter. 'In the morning I have to work for my father. When I finish a *katchi* [about 0.06 ha] I'm free to work on the eight *katchi* my father gave me, where I grow vegetables and tomatoes. My wife got two *katchi* from my father where she also grows vegetables. She's cooking for me and helps me in my field, but for my father she has to do planting, harvesting and selling in the market. The profit from our fields we can use for ourselves—for instance, to buy clothes. Every fourth day my father gives me 200 CFA francs for buying condiments for our kitchen and he also provides maize, petroleum and medicines. If we're working in my father's fields we get a meal in the morning and afternoon. I don't know how many years I'll work for father in this way. It's up to him to decide when this apprenticeship should end.'

Only Dossou's eldest son is independent now. He grew up with Dossou's eldest brother, was 'liberated' by him and has now come back, more or less, to his father. He and his wife give his father assistance when asked, and in turn his father helps them—for instance, with free electricity.

Dossou's enterprise is not diversified much. He does not hand over to his own sons or male 'clients' responsibility for handling money. 'Women', he says, 'do not have the courage to eat too much of my money', so it is they who market his agricultural produce, with the exception of cotton. Now that he is growing older he has had to close his maize flour mill and stop distilling *sodabi*. He no longer lets out his house in town to strangers; the son who was in charge of collecting the rent absconded with it. According to Dossou's strategy, women have of course to help their husband in sowing and harvesting, and they have to go to the market to sell the farm's produce; but if their loyalty is to be retained they also have to have some scope for making money for themselves. All Dossou's eight wives have a business that uses agricultural products—making and selling palm oil, etc.—and six control land of their own. The richest wife has 0.5 ha of land on loan from her husband and another 1 ha from her father; she has bought 6 ha herself and she runs a little shop.

Whether he likes it or not, Dossou is considered, both by some members of his family and by others in the village, to be a dangerous sorcerer. This gives

him some power and deters people from daring to siphon off his wealth (compare Ouden, 1987: 18–19: ‘management of terror’).

In 1985, for example, a serious conflict arose between Dossou and Semalon, his younger brother by the same mother. Semalon, who had worked for Dossou for years, had become an important farmer in his own right. He had won first prize for being the best farmer in Mono province, and—a diplomatic blunder by the authorities—his elder brother got second prize. Soon after, Semalon started drinking too much and fell ill. To everyone in the village, and outside, it was clear what was happening; Semalon too was (and is) convinced that his brother tried to kill him out of envy. By 1989 Semalon had recovered but he was still rather a broken man. During his illness he was much helped by the leader of the Kpèkpè group (see the next section), who is now the biggest entrepreneur in Komihoué. Both inside and outside the village it is common knowledge that in 1984 Dossou killed the previous leader of the Kpèkpè group (the elder brother of the present head) by sorcery, which caused his *sodabi* plant to catch fire.

Another of Dossou’s younger brothers (but by a different mother) also worked a long time for Dossou. He was ‘liberated’ by Dossou because Dossou, following their father’s death, took his half-brother’s mother as his own wife. This younger brother, who had two wives, became quite a prosperous farmer. The story is that Dossou could not bear the success of his younger brother and therefore put a curse on him. The brother was bitten by a dog, was helped during his illness by Semalon, but eventually lost a leg. Now he can no longer work, both wives have left him and he has even had to give back the 1.5 ha with which Dossou had made him independent. He has thus become very poor (like two other brothers) and is heavily dependent upon Dossou and Semalon.

The reputation of being a dangerous sorcerer can be profitable, but it is also risky. The villagers of Komihoué know of several cases where men and women alike have been ‘destroyed’ through accusations of sorcery. Dossou, however, has a large, loyal following and has for some time been closely allied to another brother, of the same age but by a different mother; like Dossou, this man is an important farmer but in addition he is an important traditional healer of some repute in south Bénin. This brother had tried as a farmer in 1987–88 to reach the levels of production Dossou and Semalon had achieved, but had failed; he could not mobilise sufficient labour from his own household and he could not control his paid labourers effectively. Though his attempt to produce a massive harvest of cotton that year failed disastrously, the attendant ‘loss of face’ did not affect his good relations with Dossou.

The Kpèkpè family: a multiple enterprise

There were six Kpèkpè brothers in Komihoué, the eldest of whom died in a fire in 1984. The second brother is not very healthy. He helped his eldest brother in his textile business, but now tries to earn a (poor) living off the 1.5 ha of land his brothers gave him. The Kpèkpè group, as it is known, consists today of four brothers. As in Dossou’s case, the father of the Kpèkpè brothers was a big farmer. He, moreover, had many contacts outside the village because he was at the same time a textile merchant. This may have led to the greater ‘nation-orientedness’ of this family, compared with the

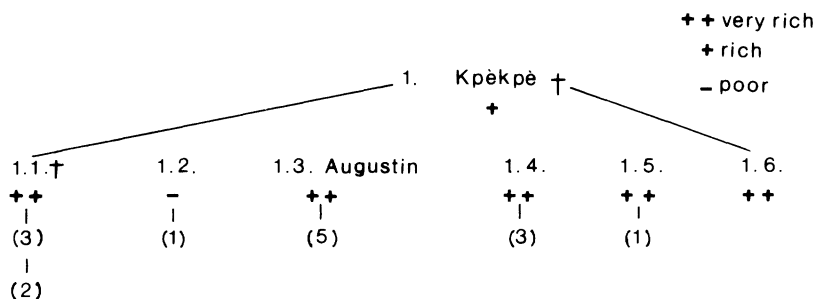


FIG. 3. Male members of the Kpèkpè family. Total number of male descendants shown in parentheses

'community-orientedness' of Dossou and his relatives. School education is also valued more highly by the Kpèkpès than by (in particular) Dossou.

The eldest brother respected his father's wish that the sons should work jointly and should not divide the land. He greatly enlarged the business and diversified its activities in line with the wishes and expertise of his brothers. The three younger brothers became drivers, and thus a lorry and some smaller pick-up trucks (Peugeots *bachées*) were bought. When one of these young brothers had a serious accident, a timber business based in Cotonou was started up for (and by) him.¹¹

After the death of the eldest brother the third brother, Augustin, 47 years old in 1989, became the undisputed leader of the group. He had always specialised more in agriculture and the distilling of *sodabi*. Though he says that all the enterprises managed by the different brothers are common property, it is he who has increased the total amount of their land holdings to somewhere between 200 ha and 300 ha. Because of labour problems, he too cannot exceed the 16 ha of annual crops: depending on the season he puts 12 ha under cotton or maize and has 4 ha for beans, groundnuts, tomatoes, etc. The rest of the land is used for oil palm forests (110 ha are known to the state development organisation as his), teak (50 ha), coffee and cocoa trial fields (3 ha), with some left in fallow or out on temporary loan to members of the family and others.

The striking difference between the strategy of the Kpèkpè group and that of Dossou and his group lies in the mobilisation of labour. Among the Kpèkpè quite small families are the rule: 'When you have many wives and many children, you are only producing thieves. What are they going to do afterwards?' In 1989 the four Kpèkpè brothers together had nine sons, only two of whom were over 15. There were also the two elder sons of the deceased eldest brother. One was a (lazy) medicine man of 25 who looked after several dozen pigs; when Augustin was not at home, he supervised the activities of women and children in the extended household and received messages. The other was a boy of 19 who was very active in agriculture and the only 'son' trusted by Augustin to supervise labourers or even to give them their pay. Augustin is unique among the farmers of Komihoué in being able to some extent to mobilise large numbers of paid

labourers effectively. These labourers have to come from the old Dogbo Adja villages—Houé, for example—which lie a considerable distance away from Komihoué (some 15 km by motorcycle). As one of the Dossou brothers complained, 'There is not enough poverty in our villages'. In the villages along the Dogbo–Lokossa road few male and female day labourers are to be found.

If anyone wants to mobilise large numbers of labourers in the Dogbo Adja area on a regular basis he will need a trustworthy agent in the region, first to recruit the labourers and then, once the advance payments have been made, to ensure they come to work. The agent must be able to supervise their work and able to be relied upon to pay the labourers without 'eating' the money himself. Some farmers (including two brothers of Dossou) have tried to work with agents in Houé and neighbouring villages but failed, with heavy losses.

Augustin's relationship with his labour intermediary (who lives in the Dogbo Adja area) is not at all commoditised and single-stranded.¹² The agent, a maternal relative of Augustin's younger brothers, receives no salary for his work. Augustin gives him presents, helps him improve his house and sorts out the family's financial problems. Backed by the financial power of Augustin, by Augustin's political influence in the Dogbo Adja villages and by his connections with the authorities in Dogbo Tota, this man is quite able to engage considerable numbers of labourers who do in fact come and work after receiving payment in advance. Poor people cannot afford to be blacklisted by Augustin and his agent. These Dogbo Adja labourers work mainly on Augustin's fields near Houé and other Dogbo villages; most of them do not have to come as far as Komihoué. Another agent, in Houé, acts for Augustin in buying land in the Dogbo Adja area. Augustin knows that this 'politician' (as people in Houé call him) cannot be trusted completely and that he sometimes tries to cheat. For instance, he once sold part of a palm plantation owned by Augustin, on the assumption that Augustin did not know its exact boundaries. This agent is not formally paid, either: he just gets presents, and Augustin has bailed him out of prison several times. Augustin cannot readily let him down because he knows too much about Augustin's sometimes dubious land transactions.

Augustin's strategy for the mobilisation and control of manpower has its limits. On the one hand he needs paid labourers who live and work some distance from him; they are quite expensive (in relation to the prices received for the produce and the production risks). On the other hand he needs reliable supervisors, whether from his own family or not, who can be trusted to organise things and handle money without stealing from him. As mentioned, he cannot expand his acreage of annual crops beyond the present 16 ha. The maize and cotton grown on the low-lying black-soil depressions are always liable to flood. If flooding occurs after much expensive weeding has been done the financial loss can be considerable. Augustin has to manage the whole agricultural sector himself, with the help only of the agent just mentioned and a boy of 19 from his family. Supervision poses problems which require specific solutions.

Farm work, whether it be clearing, weeding or harvesting, is done one field at a time, otherwise the hired work force cannot be controlled. 'Working in different

fields at the same time will lead to theft.' Cleaning up the palm and (young) teak forests is also done section by section to make it possible for the work to be supervised. For the same reason Augustin, unlike Dossou, has a clear policy of buying land for the express purpose of consolidating his holdings into large blocks.

Like most of the farmers in Komihoué (and Adjohoué) Augustin does not give land in sharecropping.

In March 1993 he told me, as did others, 'It just isn't profitable if you get from the sharecropper a third of a crop worth at most 30,000 CFA francs per hectare per year. If you plant a hectare of oil palms instead, and sell them after twenty years—or, better still, make your own *sodabi* from them—you get more than 2 million CFA francs, not counting the fruit you get. Should you be willing to give some land out for sharecropping in the low, black soils people don't want them, because those soils are too heavy and the risk of waterlogging is too great. I only lend out some ten hectares of land—fields near the village to the women we married and distant fields to strangers, who guard the boundaries of my land and prevent thefts. In the fields looked after by such cultivators I plant my own orange trees. Those I lend land to temporarily don't work for me for free. They do give me priority, however, whenever I need wage labourers.'

A further diversification of the Kpèkpè enterprises was possible through the three younger brothers and a 'cousin' (FFBSS). The cousin is working for the Kpèkpès as a driver. He does not get a salary but is tacitly allowed to do some transport and trading on his own account. If a new activity is started up an old one has to stop, because the Kpèkpès cannot find enough reliable people to employ. The eldest son of the deceased first brother had to look after the maize-grinding machine but failed, and thus maize grinding came to an end. (The same is true of Dossou and one of his brothers.) A paint shop was opened in Cotonou in 1987, managed by one of Augustin's younger brothers, a driver, based mainly in Cotonou. One of Augustin's elder sons, till then in charge of a petrol station in Agamè, near Komihoué, was moved to Cotonou to run the shop. For some time Augustin employed a stranger from Houé to look after the petrol station, but closed it down when it started running at a loss, partly because of employee pilfering. It is interesting to note that the important activity of *sodabi* distillation is carried on in rotation, mainly by wives of the brothers who stay in Komihoué. It is done, of course, without payment.

This brings us to our final point in discussing the Kpèkpès: their demand for unconditional obedience and discipline from members of the family. It is a characteristic the Kpèkpès have in common with Dossou and the adherents of the Dossou style of labour management, though the Dossous give their wives rather more freedom than do the Kpèkpès. Hence, probably, the frequency of divorce in the Kpèkpè family. The wives get only small plots of land, about 0.25 ha each, and are supposed to help their husbands. On the other hand, they get all they need for the kitchen every fourth day (market day in Dogbo), including maize. The women of the Kpèkpè brothers have little chance of starting up on their own account either in agriculture or in commerce.

By 1989 Augustin and his three brothers had left their 'Kodjo competitors' far behind. Augustin is now the winner of national and provincial prizes for

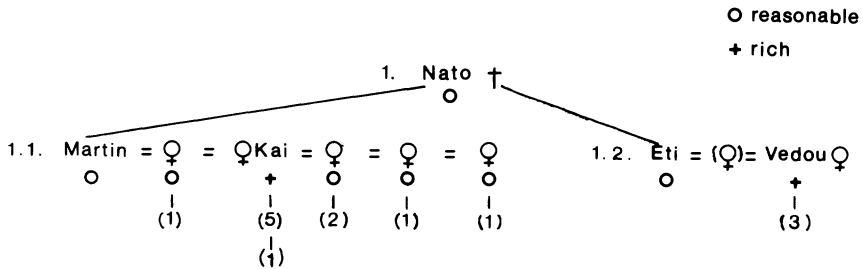


FIG. 4. *Men and wives of the Nato family. Total number of male descendants shown in parentheses*

agriculture and for care of the environment. I cannot here go into his role in 'es' and the rotating credit associations or into the opportunities it gave him to control the funds temporarily under his control. (On such tactics compare Fanou, 1992: 209). During the last days of the (Marxist) *ancien régime* of President Kerekou his network even enabled him to enter the national parliament. This does not mean, however, that he can manipulate the authorities at will or prevent losses. Indeed, he lost most of his plots in the town of Dogbo when they were requisitioned without compensation to extend the market place and car park.

The Nato family: rural traders

Out of my case material on the Chikpi-Adja of Adjòhoué village I have chosen a family which, to some extent, can be called typical of the village, though it too of course has its idiosyncrasies. From the Nato family I will briefly take for discussion the cases of two brothers and one of the wives of each (Ouden, 1991: 40–3).

Martin Nato is about 60. He went to the elementary school in Athiémé, the old French capital of Mono province, where he stayed with a friend of his father. He worked on his father's farm for three years; after his father's death in 1948 he left for Ghana to stay with a maternal uncle. There he worked as an agricultural labourer and did some buying and selling of anything that could earn a profit. He returned to Adjòhoué in 1952 with a capital of 80,000 CFA francs. He started trading in textiles, buying in Lomé and Cotonou and selling in the Mono markets. In 1958 he learned to drive a car as an apprentice of the biggest merchant in Adjòhoué today. In 1959 he bought a delivery van to transport his own merchandise and carry goods for others. He did some driving himself but also had paid employees. Like so many people, he had difficulty controlling his drivers—who kept back part of the takings and overloaded the car—and eventually ran up losses.¹³ In 1977 he sold his last car.

Before about 1970 I could do a lot. The children were still very young and their education didn't require much of an investment. I had two wives who helped me in nearby markets, and a brother and another relative who could go with me farther afield. You need wives to do your business, but soon they have children and the children eat into your capital in the course of the time because of the cost

of their education. You need inexpensive help in transporting goods to and from market and for selling in the markets. Women can't go far away because of the children. The best course is to work with your elder boys, but they go to school, often in remote places, so that doesn't work. Also you need some time for farming. It's too expensive to buy all your foodstuffs, so you and your wives both need to farm. From 1962 till 1978 I employed a young man, but when he married I couldn't pay him a good enough salary and he left. I went on trading in textiles on a smaller scale but stopped altogether in 1984 when the capital in my business had come down to about 400,000 CFA francs. The textile business had become more and more difficult by then. Transport by road costs a lot because of all the road blocks where the police demand money. You're often stopped by customs officers, too, who want to see official import documents for goods from Togo and Nigeria. And, of course, we had to smuggle textiles from those countries because people want them—otherwise they would have been far too expensive. Women are less often stopped than men, and they often find ways of hiding cloth and avoiding controls. They can get along more easily than men.

Martin's income is very limited now. He has about 7 ha, of which 1 ha is palm forest.

I am working completely alone in agriculture. Today I can do a *katchi* [about 0.06 ha] and, perhaps, tomorrow I can do another. You don't get very far that way. You cannot pay agricultural labourers and, moreover, they have to come from the Dogbo Adja villages. In Adjòhoué you cannot find them. There may be people without a job, but the boys with school education are not prepared to do farm work, nor are fit for it. Agriculture brings me only something to eat.

Martin earns some money as seer and healer (*féticheur*). His dependent children are mainly assisted by their mothers. Three sons are studying at university (two in Cotonou, one in Mali), one is in his final year at a secondary school in Lokossa, and five boys are at the primary school in Adjòhoué. Also some elder daughters are still at school.¹⁴ The mother of the three university students lives in Cotonou most of the time (see below, Kai). Two of the students are married: their wives along with their little children stay in Martin's compound in Adjòhoué. In 1991 there was no son who was earning an income and could assist the family.

Kai is Martin's second wife. She grew up near Athiémé with a paternal cousin who ran a business. After her marriage in 1958 she started buying maize and manioc flour with 5,000 CFA francs the cousin had given her, and selling it in Cotonou. She occasionally borrowed money from her husband, as he did from her. Since 1986 she has specialised in buying tomatoes, peppers and vegetables in the markets of northern Mono for resale in the markets of Cotonou. In Mono a number of women buy for her with money she advances, and in Cotonou she has intermediaries to sell for her. If on a market day she buys produce for 60,000–80,000 CFA francs and then pays 15,000–20,000 CFA francs for the transport to Cotonou (the driver has to pay the police, etc., if necessary), she may end up with a net profit of 10,000 CFA francs. She therefore needs a not inconsiderable working capital of at least 500,000 CFA francs, given the advances she has to pay to women buying for her and the money owed her by her intermediaries in

Cotonou. She says that till now she has not been able to buy much land because of the financial assistance she has to give her children. Kai bought 0.75 ha of land with palms on it near Adjohoué for about 60,000 CFA francs and a building plot in the town of Lokossa for 100,000 CFA francs. She lives with her two eldest boys in Cotonou but often travels to the Mono markets of Azové, Klouékanmè and Hlassanmè.

Eti, Martin's brother (by another mother), at 65 years is older than Martin. His mother never married his father and, because the fetish Efa indicated incompatibility between him and his mother, Eti grew up in the families of his mother's relatives. In 1953 he starting farming on 2 ha of land bought by his mother (with money earned from trade and processing agricultural produce). He often helped his brother Martin in his textile business, and in 1958 started up in the same trade himself, but, apparently, on a smaller scale. It seems probable that while working with Martin he had also traded in cloth on his own account. In 1968 he stopped this business and started selling medicines, giving injections and making incisions. In 1973 he gave up this business too. 'I had no money left because of the fees for the children's education and furthermore I was tired of travelling a lot on my own.' He is now only somewhat active in farming: he has palms on his mother's 2 ha and he uses another 1 ha temporarily lent to him by a half-brother (by a different father).

His second wife, *Vedou*, is active as a cloth merchant. She bought 1 ha of land, but two-thirds of it she leases to a sharecropper. She owned a plot in the town of Lokossa which was expropriated by the state without compensation for the building of a textile factory. Her eldest son finished his studies in Cotonou and is now a schoolteacher; the second failed in the last year of secondary school in Cotonou and is now in Côte d'Ivoire without the permission of his parents, with whom he has lost contact. The third son failed in the first year of secondary school in Dogbo, but has now finished his apprenticeship as a tailor; he was without work in Adjohoué in 1991.

The Nato family: retrospect. The cases I have chosen to discuss from the village of Adjohoué are not the most spectacular ones, whether as cases of accumulation or of 'disaccumulation'. I have not discussed the two or three very big merchants and transporters who are still expanding their field of activities (some information is presented in the overview, below), nor have I taken into account some of the really 'big men' who, now very old, have lost almost all their wealth but who in many cases have sons and daughters with a high level of education occupying high positions in the state administration, in private companies or independently in the professions (as doctors, for example), both in and outside Bénin. Nevertheless, in the case of the family from Adjohoué we find the standard 'Chayanov-style' domestic cycle, which starts with difficulty at a low level, expands with the help of wives and some virtually unpaid youngsters, and finally declines as the children go to school and leave the village. At that point the most active women start up their own businesses, even go and live with their children elsewhere. The man for his part, after the age of about 55 or 60, can no longer, because of his age, keep control of his commercial and transport activities. In Adjohoué I found some fathers who had managed to help some sons start up in business on

their own, but there was no one who could extend the life span of his business by linking up with sons or brothers. It was not so in the case of women. We find examples of women in business working closely even with married daughters or close female kinsmen, finding themselves able to leave their trade more and more in the hands of such 'apprentices' and retaining into old age a financial interest in the affairs of their successors. Men say that it is very difficult to keep an almost unpaid son, brother or other kinsman tied in for long, because young men nowadays have much greater financial needs, which is less the case with women. Here we have to add that important businesswomen are almost always the wives of (once) important men who could help from time to time with loans or other assistance, for example in dealings with civil servants.

In the cases briefly discussed we also have indications of the increasing difficulty small traders and carriers experience with official and unofficial restrictions emanating from the state.

For example, we would mention the (corrupt) checks by police and customs officers, and, until about 1988–90, the restrictions on the trade in textiles and palm oil imposed in order to protect state enterprises and monopolies. Only the big businessmen could survive, and even manipulate, the 'Marxist' Kerekou regime after 1975 (till 1991), which was quite hostile to private enterprise in business, transport and industry. This is also one of the major reasons why the number of men in Adjòhoué active in commerce and/or transport over a period of years fell from about forty in the period 1950–80 to some five older and three or four younger men in 1991 (Ouden, 1991: 24–5). It does not mean that the money involved in commerce and transport has diminished, only that among men business and economic power is concentrated in fewer hands. Among women traders there is also some concentration, but the number of medium and small businesswomen remained substantial. In a sample of 191 adult women from Adjòhoué in March 1991, 133 were involved in some commercial activity. Of these 133, five had commercial capital of more than 500,000 CFA francs and ten were working with capital of between 100,000 and 500,000 CFA francs (Ouden, 1991: 17).

It is also striking how little attention is paid to agriculture by the Chikpi Adja of Adjòhoué. Neither the men nor their families are deeply involved in agriculture, and the men especially have great difficulty in finding domestic or low-paid labour to assist them. Farming has a low priority and people have little attachment to the land. Businessmen and women will buy land—and plant it with oil palms—against a rainy day but are quite ready to sell if, say, the need arises in old age. It would have been risky indeed for young men to stay working for their fathers in the hope of inheriting their fathers' land (or other economic activities).

The Faffè family: a case of proletarianisation

The present Faffè family of Houé divides into three branches based on the three sons of the founder who have descendants. Though the genealogical depth of the total family looks somewhat shallow, and the genealogical link between the founder and the other families in the village is unclear, the 'original' situation of control over land as well as the observations made by the villagers of Houé make it clear that we are not dealing with the

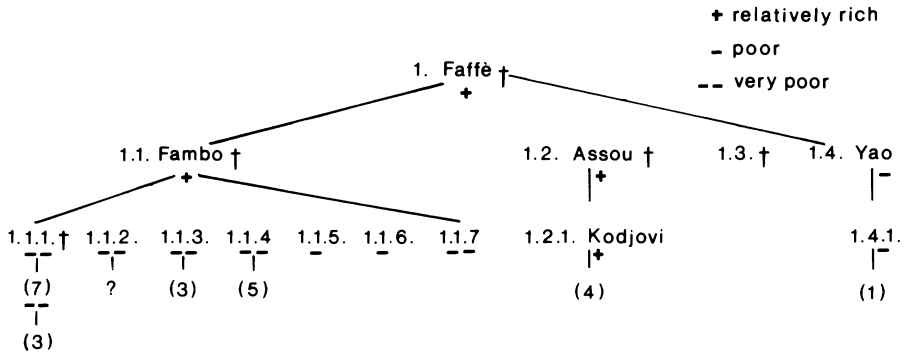


FIG. 5. Male members of the Faffè family. Total number of male descendants shown in parentheses

descendants of slaves. It seems that Faffè did not command a larger number of people, compared with some of his contemporaries in Houé. As so often among Houé agnatic families, the 'original' location of the houses of Faffè was a little outside the present settlement of Houé. Probably Faffè used only a limited amount of his land for cultivation, the rest lying fallow or being covered with oil palm groves. As with many Dogbo families in Houé, much of Faffè's land—probably about 58 ha—was mismanaged and frittered away by two of his sons. I shall look more closely at the three sons and their descendants.

Fambo. The fate of Faffè's first son, Fambo, was settled when he was appointed village headman and thus became responsible for the collection of taxes, a most dangerous position in a 'loosely structured society' like that of Dogbo Adja, where no one had or has great power in the village. He got into trouble and had to sell more than half his land (10 ha of his 19 ha). People say he committed suicide by poisoning himself in 1961 because he could see no way out of the crisis. He left seven sons; four of them sold the remaining 9 ha. I will briefly discuss their miserable situation, so characteristic of many families in Houé.

The *first* son returned to the village from Togo to find that there was no land left in the family. He returned to Togo, where he died a poor man in 1970.

He too left seven sons. In 1986 six of them were in Houé and one was in Togo. The first son, came back from Togo, married and had two sons. In Houé he worked as a *katchito*, an agricultural labourer. Since 1982 he has been back in Togo again. His wife left him, taking the children with her to save them from starvation. The second son, about 30, never married. As a labourer he worked for a long time in Cotonou and in Nigeria. In the village he tries to earn a living as a farm labourer and as a not very respected healer, selling some *grisgris*. He is not even a sharecropper. The third son worked for six years in Cotonou as a cobbler. He came back to the village because his earnings in Cotonou were so low. In the village he bought some palm trees which he sold again afterwards. He is now an agricultural labourer and sharecrops 0.5 ha. His wife left him because of his

poverty, leaving her first son with him and taking the second, very young, child with her; she remarried. He cooks for himself and his son. The fourth son is a more or less permanent labourer for a farmer in Komihoué; he sharecrops about 0.33 ha. The fifth son is not well mentally, and has to be looked after by his mother. The sixth and seventh sons were in a somewhat better position in 1986 because of their relatively rich mother. Until about 1988 she was a well known seer and 'traditional' healer. The sixth son farmed 0.5 ha she had lent him and worked on a young palm grove owned by her new husband (the third son of Faffè; that is, he is a great-uncle of these boys). The seventh, about 21 years old in 1986, worked from time to time as a farm labourer and depended for food on his mother.

Fambo's *second* son has no land; it was sold by the third and fourth brothers. He works as an agricultural labourer in Togo or Ghana. His family does not know whether he is married at present or not, or whether there are any children; his first wife left him because of his poverty. The *third* son is a more or less permanent labourer for a farmer in Komihoué. He sold all his land and probably also that of his elder brother. In 1986 he sharecropped about 0.33 ha owned by a man in Adjohoué. His only wife had 0.25 ha as a temporary loan from her father; she often works as a farm labourer. His eldest son, about 27 years of age, works as an agricultural labourer in another village; he went there to get fed by his maternal relatives. The second son works with his father. The *fourth* son was much feared in the village because of his close relation with a big farmer from Komihoué (Augustin; see the case of the Kpèkpè family, above) who buys much land from people in Houé and neighbouring villages. He kept Augustin informed about land which was up for sale and acted for him as a witness, even when the contract was 'dirty'. (The trick is to make the illiterate owner think he is only pawning the land for cash but get him to 'sign' a document which declares he is in fact selling the land.) In 1986 Augustin allowed this more or less permanent labourer and his wife to continue to cultivate the land the fourth son had sold to him but which had not yet been brought into use by Augustin; in 1991, however, it appeared that Augustin had abandoned him completely. When this son replied to his wife's plea for assistance (a reply considered extremely humiliating, even in Houé), 'Wait till our patron comes. He'll give you something to eat,' the wife left him and remarried. Though his houses still show traces of their former prosperity, the reality now is stark poverty.

The future of the *fifth* son looked somewhat brighter than that of his brothers. He sold his land to pay for an apprenticeship. He became a mechanic, repairing cycles and motor cycles in Agamè, where he also became the manager of a filling station owned by Augustin, the big farmer from Komihoué. In 1988 he was dismissed on suspicion of embezzlement. He now seems to scratch a living in Lokossa. He is the only one of the seven brothers to have had some school education. His wife has a small business selling cigarettes, etc. Fambo's *sixth* son was for long a labourer in Ghana and Togo, and is now an agricultural labourer in Houé; he sharecrops 0.6 ha. His wife, from Togo, works hard as an agricultural labourer and as a retailer of *sodabi*. The *seventh* son, now about 30, sold the small amount

of land he inherited to a relative, the son of his uncle Assou. He also share-crops 0.66 ha and works as a wage labourer. He is not married and does his own cooking.

Assou. The story of the family of Assou, the second son of Faffè, is quite different. From his father Assou inherited about 19 ha of 'red land', somewhat higher up on the edges of a black-soil depression. It should be remembered that red soil is recognised as good for growing oil palms. He kept a very low profile, did reasonably well in agriculture and left his inheritance intact to his only son, Kodjovi. This man started about 1965 by selling slightly over 0.5 ha in order to marry and to start a *sodabi* distillery. Later he was able to buy more than 2 ha, bringing his total holding to over 20 ha. He has the reputation of being very avaricious. He does not participate in work teams—which anyway have become very rare in Houé—and on the rare occasions when he does employ labour he only takes on temporary workers. He has about 2.5–3.0 ha under cotton, maize, beans, etc., and the remaining 18 ha are palm groves, cleaned up in November–December by some Houénou seasonal workers from the north of the province. He prepares *sodabi* using only his own palms. His family labour force is minimal: there is only himself. His first wife left him and remarried; her son (now about 27 years old) also left without his consent and now works as a labourer in Nigeria for a group of Adja people who prepare *sodabi*. His second wife died, as did his third. 'He is fonder of his money than of his wives,' people say. They fell ill, were never taken to hospital and died. In 1986 there was one wife left. She cultivates the 0.25 ha she got from her husband and prepares palm oil from nuts she buys from him. Kodjovi told me that he does not like to invest too much in the village, because of his poor and envious relatives. They might try to get something out of him. I do not know what other assets he has. As a farmer said to me in 1991, 'He seems to be quite rich and to have a bank account, but we don't know'. He would like to invest money in plots in Cotonou but, as far as I know, has not so far dared take the plunge in such a high-risk business.

Yao. The third branch, the Yao family, is again rather more 'normal' for Houé village—that is, it too is in the process of impoverishment. In 1986 the old man had already sold 16 ha or 17 ha, and was then negotiating the sale of a palm grove of about 2 ha, which meant that he had disposed of almost all his land. He 'liberated' his only son with 0.75 ha and that is all the son will ever receive from his father. The son now often works as an agricultural labourer. Yao took over the wife of the deceased first son of Fambo. In 1986 she was still an important seer and healer, owning a good house—in sharp contrast with the huts of her new husband and his first wife. She had also bought 0.6 ha which she lent to her son by her first marriage. By 1991 her fame as a healer had come to an end: 'She does not "see" clearly any more and has made many mistakes'.

The Faffè family: retrospect. The situation outlined here stands in sharp contrast with, for example, Sara Berry's findings in Yorubaland (1985: 84): '... agricultural accumulation did not entail dispossession, nor did it create a rural proletariat, a middle peasantry, or a class of capitalist farmers'. I find it difficult to explain why so many Dogbo families of Houé found themselves

in such desperate straits. The men do not like farm work, and they particularly dislike working the low-lying depressions, with their heavy black clay. Unlike the Ehoué of Komihoué the Dogbo of Houé work on their fields only in the morning and need the rest of the day to 'recover'. Many men also told me that they take an aspirin (for work on the black soils, two) when they start work, in order to be able to stand the sunshine. Very often they have nothing else to eat before beginning a day's work. It seems that they were simply caught unprepared for rising expectations of a higher standard of living and by the process of monetisation of goods and services. They sold much of their land not only to satisfy their increasing needs—to be able to afford their cigarettes', as others say—but certainly also to cover periods of drought when maize harvests were bad. No alternative sources of income were developed outside agriculture. With scarcely an exception the educational level is very low, and that means the majority of the migrants from the village work as labourers (56 per cent of the forty-three migrants from my selected families of Houé). Furthermore, many migrants have now returned to the village because of the deteriorating economic situation in Bénin, Ghana, Togo and Nigeria. They have a struggle to make a living in Houé and its environs as agricultural day labourers and farming as sharecroppers on tiny patches of land. Though the women in general are working hard on land lent by their fathers, husbands, etc. (the average holding per adult woman in the Faffè family was six and a half *aboho* or 0.25 ha), many of them could not manage and had left their husbands. In the Faffè family we find only seven wives among twelve adult men (Ouden, 1986: 59). Some women try to supplement their growing needs—which often include caring for husbands and elder boys—by engaging in some small commercial activity, but very often their capital is too small and too rapidly exhausted to make it a success. Usually, for men as well as for women, the only way out is to find work as agricultural day labourers in fields they had earlier sold to farmers from Koffihoué ward or Komihoué village. When I asked a farmer of the Koffi family (Ehoué Adja) why he was not buying land near the provincial capital, Lokossa, he answered, 'The Dogbo of this area have nothing to sell any more'.

In concluding, I should re-emphasise how specific is this particular labour problem to these Dogbo families. The men do not work hard in their own fields, but neither can they mobilise domestic non-commoditised labour from others. Adult sons refuse to work for their fathers and mothers, and when the pressure upon them to do so becomes too great they simply leave the village. Wives work for their husbands only where there is balanced reciprocity—otherwise they have to be paid. Farmers' work teams became almost extinct because of conflict over the amount of labour provided by team members (compare Barker, 1989: 92). Hiring wage labourers from the village itself is also risky. They have to be paid in advance but how can you force your own villagers—perhaps even your own kinsmen—to show up? In 1986 a foreign agricultural expert with experimental plots in Houé bemoaned the stupidity and laziness of the villagers: 'The rains have started now but they haven't begun work as agreed'. There may be some truth in his judgement, but what one of the farmers concerned said to me is also

significant: 'How can I start the work? Where do I find the labour I need?' Of course this was the time, the start of the rains, when the big landlords of Komihoué and Koffihoué had begun farm work, competing for labour and offering more secure employment and payment than the Dogbo farmers of Houé could. Furthermore, many small farmers themselves first have to start labouring for big landlords to earn some cash before they can begin work on their own fields.

OVERVIEW: STYLES AND STRATEGIES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF LABOUR

If we look at the situation in the three villages we can find some broad styles in the mobilisation and management of labour. Some patterns may be purposely chosen by the actors, but even then they are strongly influenced by (changing) structural features and by specific personal circumstances.

The old style

We still find in a considerable number of cases the old style of labour management in which people want to have many wives and many children, and in that way to create a powerful household. Sons are released, or 'liberated', with a grant of land and their fathers pay the bridewealth for at least one wife. A number of fathers prefer their sons to stay and work with them. To these sons they grant cultivation rights on particular plots of land which the sons will eventually inherit. In addition they will have their share of the remaining land when it is divided equally between the sons on their father's death. We suggest that this style of labour management, locally associated with the category of 'blessed people' called *alo-su amè dji* (see p. 3), is under great pressure and is breaking down. The pressure—broadly resulting from processes of commercialisation and monetisation and from changing, more expensive life styles—is applied by the heads of households and by their sons and adopted kinsmen. The heads of polygynous households are gradually moving towards a form of accumulation in which they are using their dependants as a cheap, non-commoditised labour force which makes the accumulation of personal wealth and investment possible. In discussing the best way of mobilising labour these old-style household heads try to calculate the surplus they can appropriate from their dependants. As for their sons and other dependants, they increasingly recognise that they are being exploited, and, anyway, want to become independent and to do well financially at an early age. They do not want to wait endlessly till 'their time comes', let alone in agriculture. Wives are now increasingly important as the producers of food for the household while the men grow cash crops like cotton. But what do they gain from this new—'deal'? How can they get the money for their own needs and those of their children? The result is that women refuse to play this new role of 'cheap labour' and start up their own money-generating activities. The head of the household must be strong, a good diplomat, inspiring confidence and helped by the local culture in asserting his 'rights', if he wants to use his dependants as cheap, virtually unpaid labour for the purpose of accumulation.¹⁵ As we saw earlier, Dossou made this system work, up to a point: the amount of land

he controlled became considerable, but the amount of land he could put under annual crops was restricted, while his ability to diversify was almost nil—especially as he grew old—because male members of the household could not be trusted with money. The mutual trust between the head of the household and his sons and other dependants has largely disappeared, as has family discipline.

In Komihoué Dossou is not unique in following the old style. The strategy is followed with success by some families who recently came from other Ehoué Adja villages in the north in order to work and pay off their debts (usually bridewealth); others were adopted into Komihoué households. As soon as possible they married about four wives, worked hard at agriculture and in 1989 already owned some 5–12 ha, working almost exclusively with 'their own people', including some 'adopted' relatives (Ouden 1990: 58–61). However, households that follow this style can erupt in conflict between father and adult sons or adopted boys, and the sons are often supported in their rebellion by their mothers. In the following case of the family of a big Ehoué farmer from Koffihoué ward, near Houé, such conflict is foreseen and, if possible, averted. I spoke to the farmer in 1986 and 1991; the conversation dates from February 1991.

'An important difference between Dossou from Komihoué and myself is that my sons become independent when they get married and they themselves decide when they're going to marry. They choose a wife themselves and I pay the bride-wealth and give them a hectare of land each to start up with. After that they don't work for me any more. If they do, then it's a bit like *efidodo* [work parties in agriculture]: they help me and I help them on a trade-off basis. Dossou will learn his lesson: with those married sons he also gets the burden of their families. In 1986 I was still cultivating more than a dozen hectares together with my sons. Now the area under annual crops has come down to four or five hectares. If I prepare more land for cultivation, I can't handle the clearing and weeding. I don't want many paid labourers: they don't work properly and you have to supervise them all the time. More and more of my land is forested with palm and teak now, and I concentrate more on making *sodabi*.' This farmer has now eight wives; after the age of about 50 he did not marry again. 'I fear for the future of the small children when I'm old or dead.' In this he differs from Dossou. However, they are alike in their distrust of school education and the way boys are alienated from agriculture. In 1986 he started sending to school one son per mother and in 1991 he thought of doing the same for his daughters. I am not saying this household does not have its problems. When in 1986 the farmer married his last wife I said to him that he must have created a very considerable work force. His answer was rather cynical: 'I had to marry an eighth wife because the others don't work properly for me any more, and their sons too create problems.'

The most important merchant of Adjohoué, Badjè, about 62 years old in 1991, is an example of the way a man tries to build up a significant work force through marriages. Of his fourteen wives, one had died and three were divorced, which means that he has still ten. Here we also find the tactic of marrying at least some women from distant places in order to create or promote commercial relations.¹⁶ This merchant's strategy, in my view, has been only partially successful (Ouden, 1991: 32–6).

Of the twenty-eight sons alive in 1991, twelve were over 15 years old, seven or eight

of them already having a job. Badjè now works with one son who drives one of his tankers. One son is an apprentice carpenter in his yard in Lokossa and another (until March 1991) lived in his house in Cotonou and answered telephone calls for him there. There is another son who can be found at weekends in Adjòhoué helping his father with bookkeeping (Badjè is illiterate); during the week he has a job in Lokossa with the state development organisation. Another son used to sell bread from his father's bakeries but is now an independent driver with his own car. Badjè works closely with two of his wives: one sells bread and supervises two of his bakeries in Lokossa, the other sells his salt and supervises a petrol station in Dogbo. I have the impression that Badjè gave (and still gives) loans of money to some of his other wives and that he takes a share of their profits afterwards. Four of his wives are important cloth traders or specialise in grain trading. Badjè is prepared to pay his relatives only low salaries, on the grounds that they are kinsmen, entitled to received help if they work hard and want to start their own business in their 'spare time'. The son who drives a tanker accepts his low salary of 20,000 CFA francs per month because of the interest-free assistance his father gives him. He lives free in his deceased grandfather's house in Adjòhoué and runs a pub-cum-shop in Dogbo rent-free in one of his father's buildings.¹⁷ Another son, however, could not stand it and left his father's service. 'He paid me 20,000 or 25,000 CFA francs a month, whereas I needed double that.' Badjè himself complains vehemently that it is difficult to find reliable workers and supervisors. He thinks relatives ask too much and work irregularly: 'Most of them start behaving like managers immediately without doing very much. Nowadays most of the people working for me are not my kinsmen.'¹⁸

It is not only old people who try to follow the old style of labour relations. I have already mentioned some younger protégés of Dossou, and I now add the case of a merchant in Adjòhoué.

Modeste was 32 years old in 1991 and already had six wives, one of whom he took over from a deceased brother. Apart from a year working as a cook for a Yoruba in Lagos, he helped his father in his iron trade and petrol selling. 'It was something I had to do, because my father is illiterate and was being cheated a lot by his apprentices.' Modeste has been independent of his father since about 1980 and now has petrol stations in a nearby Dogbo Adja village and in Djakotomè. 'I kept away from the area where Badjè and his brother are active in the petrol business.' He works together with two of his wives: they live near the filling stations in order to manage them, and have some sidelines of their own, such as selling rice, sugar and roasted peanuts. When I asked him what he was going to do with the other four wives, he answered that he would employ them when he expanded his business.

To conclude this discussion of the first style of labour management I could elaborate on cases where people tried but failed to follow this pattern. But I will quote a final remark from one of the big but frustrated farmers of Komihoué, a full brother of Dossou:

'Working with your sons has become difficult. They're never satisfied and always want more money. Taking on more wives isn't profitable any more, either. Working with paid labourers is more efficient, but they're difficult to find because there's not enough poverty in our villages. This farmer recognises that the old days are over but has yet to find an answer to his labour problem' (Ouden, 1990: 49).

The new style

In the second style of labour management the number of wives and sons is restricted, as is the number of 'adopted' kinsmen and strangers who have to be 'liberated' and paid off with a wife and some land. Locally people associate this style with the category of accumulators called *eho wu amè*. Here the fear is of dispersing wealth among a great many people. This does not, however, mean that non-commoditised labour is not used or that people eschew non-commoditised relationships to further their financial interests. Too many wives, men say, produce too many children for whom there can be no guarantee of enough land or a good job in town. Furthermore, elder sons and their wives give rise to increasing difficulty because they want money, luxury goods and more freedom. Non-commoditised labour, they add, is still not cheap: you have to provide your dependants with a relatively high standard of living, you have to pay for petrol, medicines, etc., you have to pay bridewealth for at least one wife and, finally, give them land which is becoming an increasingly scarce and thus expensive resource. Some men are therefore looking for less expensive and less troublesome forms of labour which can be more readily disposed of and is not a chronic burden. They are also thinking about the 'normal' African 'failure to make adequate arrangements for the successful transfer of business interests to the next generation' (Kennedy, 1988–90: 170).

Among the families analysed in the three villages who more or less follow this second style I came across three kinds of more personal strategy. The *first* is a group of brothers, each with a small family, working tightly together under the direction of the eldest brother, but each having responsibilities in his own sector of a diversified enterprise. The Kpèkpè family is a good example. The rivalry between brothers, and people's normal mistrust, make such groups rare, in farming as well as in trade, but the Kpèkpès have been successful partly because each brother has his own distinct economic domain.

I know of only one other association-like working together of brothers in the three villages. The people concerned are Dogbo Adja of Houé village, but, as they themselves say, they clearly have an 'Ehoué' outlook. They are six relatively wealthy brothers each of whom has married no more than three wives. Their father warned them on his deathbed that he would kill any son who dared to sell part of the family land. For me and my adult assistant from Houé it was difficult to find out how this group functioned, but it eventually became clear that they were working separately on their own farms as well as engaging in their other activities. For a long time they stood by their assertion that all their land, the four maize mills and a palm kernel crusher were the property of the eldest brother, which appeared not to be the case (Ouden, 1989: 11). The brothers consult each other frequently and their sons (ranging in number from none to seven per brother) often work together in a joint labour group (*efidodo*). On this subject, in January 1991, one of the brothers remarked with true anthropological insight, 'You shouldn't have too many wives, because one day they will be the cause of division and conflict among the various children.'

A *second* strategy is exemplified by a big farmer and *sodabi* producer from Komihoué, who is one of the paternal relatives of the Kpèkpès. He does not

want to have many wives and children—in 1989, apart from his daughters, he had only three wives and eight sons. Yet he still has great problems finding and working with agricultural day labourers (Ouden, 1990: 36–8). He does not want to solve this problem by the old method of taking on kinsmen and strangers as ‘sons’ who later have to be paid off with a wife and land. He hopes to transfer his property exclusively to his sons. So he tries to attract permanent labourers who work for him to repay a debt. ‘If I find someone who wants to migrate to Nigeria or Togo, I ask him what he needs. Most often the man will have run away with a girl and cannot pay the bridewealth. So I ask him to stay and work for me and let me pay his debt.’

The relationship starts with a signed bond. The stranger will earn more or less half the wage paid to a day labourer, and the money is deducted from his debt. However, the farmer gives the labourer two meals a day, petrol, medicine, and housing (where eventually the labourer’s wife will live; she too will work for the farmer). There is always the risk that labourers like these will decamp.

The farmer explicitly tries to maintain his relationship with such strangers, once their debts are paid off, by lending them land for up to ten years: the first five years with no palms, the second five with the landowner planting palms. ‘During this period they go on helping me in various ways without payment, and even organise the work on my farm when I’m not there.’ He dislikes, he says, the more impersonal relationships found in sharecropping. This farmer in 1989 was working with three paid ‘permanent’ labourers in addition to his two over-15 year old sons. Furthermore he could mobilise six families of strangers who had finished paying off their debts and were now settled on land he had lent them. In this way he manages to put 9 ha of his 22 ha under annual crops.

In discussing the Faffè family of Houé above we came across a *third* strategy. In 1986 Kodjovi was left with only one wife, though he tried to get a second one. At the time he had four sons, the eldest of whom had already fled his avaricious father and gone to Nigeria. This very individualistic strategy means keeping the labour requirement to a minimum. In Kodjovi’s case this meant using his land mainly for palm groves and concentrating on the production of *sodabi*; he used some paid labour on the few hectares he needed for maize, cotton and beans. To avoid revealing your wealth and arousing envy among your circle of kinsmen and in the village, it is better to invest elsewhere, for example in plots of land and houses in towns.¹⁹

A process of proletarianisation

Hired labour is employed primarily by farmers following the new style of labour management. This is possible because there now exists a category of almost landless adult agricultural labourers (men and women), who are to be found mainly in such old Dogbo Adja villages as Houé. These people lost much of their land to both old-style and new-style farmers when land became commoditised with the introduction of cash crops like cotton,

maize, oil palm and teak. Initially there was an abundance of little-used land, much of which was given to new settlers, but during the last thirty or forty years many people have found themselves in serious trouble, having to sell during periods of drought such land as was left. Several cultural traits and processes of change were mutually reinforcing—the feeling that land was not a scarce resource, relatively weak relations of authority that quickly gave rise to a highly individualistic style of working, a tendency to consume rather than invest earnings, and an aversion to hard farm work on the fertile heavy black soils. The result was that in bad years many families had insufficient reserves of maize. Marx's concept of the *Lumpenproletariat*, combining a high degree of internally oriented aggression and individualistic behaviour, can be applied to many people, including whole villages of Dogbo: they cannot mobilise enough non-commoditised labour from within their own families, they have no other dependants who can be mobilised, they can no longer organise work groups or form associations of brothers and, finally, they cannot afford to hire agricultural labourers.

These almost landless adult labourers are clearly distinct, as a category, from others who get into difficulty. In the latter category are those who have become disabled and cannot work any more. Another common group are the elderly, who, at the end of the domestic cycle, may already have distributed many of their resources and are now facing increasing difficulties in running their businesses and mobilising labour. The two Nato brothers discussed earlier are a good example. With his textile and transport businesses in decline, and his consequent inability to continue paying wages, Martin now farms almost alone, assisted by some sons during the holidays and by four of his five wives (who plant, harvest and market food crops). The local official of the state rural development organisation, CARDER, reports that Martin occasionally becomes reckless and starts clearing a block of land of several hectares, only to find he has not the money to weed it properly. So he reaps a poor harvest and becomes discouraged again. Of course, people like Martin and his brother Eti (financially assisted by his second wife) cannot be compared with those in utter poverty: during their days in commerce they decided to give at least their sons a good education so as to get them into good white-collar jobs.

Sharecropping

In discussing styles and strategies in the management of labour I have hardly touched upon labour tied by sharecropping or temporary grants of land. Sharecropping as a means of getting labour is practised mainly by small farmers in the old Dogbo area (in Houé village, for example). Often these farmers do not cultivate much of their land, but themselves work also as agricultural labourers. They give out some of their land for others to sharecrop, mainly because they have an interest in the one-third of the food crops grown on the plot. (This part is harvested by the owner's women.) Usually the owner has only a few palms on the plot. It is, however, the practice of big farmers from Komihoué to take up land in sharecropping, in the hope that the owner will later sell it to them. This, for instance, is one of Dossou's strategies. Augustin, on the other hand, takes land as security for loans, land

which he then buys at the lowest possible price. In Komihoué and Adjòhoué, by contrast, sharecropping is seldom encountered; sometimes drivers, male nurses and others let land out for sharecropping because they are not farmers themselves. Where the wealthier farmers (who are often involved in trade and transport as well) are concerned, growing palms promises a much better return than sharecropping. They prefer to let members of their family have the use of the land on loan, and if not relatives, then Ehoué from the north, or other strangers. The proprietor will plant palms, which means that the cultivators have to leave after seven years. Meanwhile it is their job to protect the palms from ants and grasscutters. As with sharecropping, so with the temporary gift of land, it was not easy to discern any great difference between the two styles, the old one and its alternative. In both camps there seem to be people who by this means lend impoverished relatives a helping hand (at the same time getting their palms looked after) and others who stress the need to guard distant fields and admit they use temporary gifts of land as a way of putting people under an obligation against the day when they will need to hire labour. In only one instance did I come across labourers being temporarily granted a plot of land after working off a debt on condition that they rendered their former employer various services free of charge.

In sum, the multi-stranded relationship between landowners and the recipients of temporary gifts of land is profitable to both parties. In this district the whole question of binding labour by means of sharecropping and loans of land is largely subject to the economics of palm cultivation by large- and medium-scale farmers who are also into trade and transport.

Summary

The material I have presented on this rural Adja region makes it clear that there is a real labour problem: people who want to expand their enterprises need cheap, reliable labour, but such labour is difficult to find and keep. The sort of 'big men' known as *alo-su amè dji*—those mainly interested in investing in and dominating people—increasingly suffer from what may be called a psychological and social dilemma. Many of them would like to keep up the appearance of being a 'big man', with many people under their control, but they cannot avoid the temptations of modern times, and aspire to increase their personal wealth. According to their style of management, they want to use mainly domestic labour, yet they face more and more problems as the young begin to distrust the intentions of their household heads. The latter are suspected of looking first to their own interests, and their followers doubt whether they will get a fair share of the assets when there are so many of them in a big family. Furthermore, sons and dependants find a long, very low-paid 'apprenticeship' increasingly problematic. Disruptive conflicts often result. But there are other problems. Certain farmers have encouraged their sons to take up an apprenticeship in a particular occupation, some in the (often vain) hope that one day it will help to diversify their enterprise, others in the belief that their existing business will not provide a good enough living for all their dependants. In other cases

it is not the father but the mother who decides the child's future. Whatever the case, the end result is the loss of potential workers for the enterprise. It is important to note that some farmers relying on domestic labour anticipate future trouble and 'liberate' sons who want to marry or have become rebellious, 'to let them experience the hardship of independence'. But sub-groups among the Adja vary in this: generally the Ehoué Adja, unlike the Dogbo and Chikpi Adja, are more successful at working with domestic labour because authority within the family is stricter and remains more acceptable. I am not saying that the use mainly of non-commoditised domestic labour cannot produce good results. Indeed, a number of cases prove the opposite. The case material makes it clear that in both styles of labour mobilisation and management the growing of oil palms and, to a lesser extent, teak is not only profitable but is also an important solution to the labour problem. If you accumulate land, it is not necessary to grow annual, labour-intensive crops on all of it.

We do find among a great many people a growing awareness of the difficulties not only of working with domestic labour but also of the splintering effect of redistribution among a great many people. A small but probably increasing number want accumulation not only for themselves but also for a restricted number of descendants. This new style is associated with the type of accumulators called *eho wu amè*, people who try to maximise financial profits. Here, of course, we also find much variation. It is not at all self-evident that everyone in this category followed this style from the outset. One person may have tried the old style of working mainly with family labour but failed because of domestic conflicts with wives, children and other dependants. Others have seen the advantages they themselves had as an only son or as one of few surviving brothers. Yet others still feel bitter over their exploitation at the hands of their elder brothers after their father's death. A number of people too have experience of the way Lebanese traders organise their small families and work with hired labour. In the new type of accumulation entrepreneurs work with little family labour and they hire labour. The number of children available for work inside the domestic unit is further reduced by the relatively heavy emphasis on education and careers in government service or the professions (compare the title of Sarah Berry's book, *Fathers Work for their Sons*). This not only makes it harder to run a business but can make it difficult to hand it on to the next generation.

Problems of mobilising and managing labour, then, play an important role in both the different styles of accumulation, affecting not so much the amount of land which can be accumulated *per se* as the amount of land which can be used for annual crops like cotton, maize, beans or peppers. Diversification of enterprises is also much affected by labour problems under both management styles; both, too, have difficulty in the transfer of enterprises to the next generation. I have already pointed to the splintering that results from big polygynous families, and how matters are made still worse when there are other dependants expecting compensation. Relatively large enterprises often break up, stranding former dependants in relative poverty while, perhaps, the only people to prosper are those 'sons' who had already been set up during their father's lifetime. In small and large

families alike, the question is whether there emerges a strong enough successor who has both the ambition and the ability to follow in his father's footsteps. Finally, of course, an enterprise experiences all the problems that come when the entrepreneur himself becomes too old to manage it.

In offering this highly ethnographic and actor-oriented account I have sought to show that problems of labour management have to be taken seriously—especially in areas of Africa where wage labour remains problematic yet the old style of controlling domestic labour no longer quite works in the face of commercialisation, monetisation and the demand for higher living standards. Though I have focused primarily on farming enterprises, my argument applies equally to enterprises that centre on trade and transport.

NOTES

¹ In this article I shall concentrate mainly on male entrepreneurs, with only some data on women.

² Animal traction and ploughing are well known but rejected by farmers. They say that the wretched animals almost drowned during demonstrations in the wet, heavy black soils of the depression. Apparently the big farmers are waiting for very light but strong tractors. Even then, their usefulness will depend largely on cotton and maize prices, and what farmers will have to spend on non-commoditised and commoditised labour.

³ Compare also Swindell (1985: 89) on the two styles.

⁴ Compare Hart (1982: 39, also 40): 'It is particularly important to stress that traditional villages based on kinship were not necessarily models of social equality.'

⁵ Hart (1975: 32), writing about Fra Fra commercial entrepreneurs: the problem is to find 'a successful formula for making money and keeping a vast army of followers reasonably happy'. Also Ouden (1990: 70).

⁶ My research—carried out in three short periods of three and a half months each in 1986, 1989 and 1991—took place within the framework of inter-university co-operation between the Agricultural University, Wageningen, and the National University of Bénin, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, financed by the Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Co-operation, and was paid for by these projects and by Wageningen Agricultural University, the Netherlands. In February and March 1993 I collected some complementary information about tied labour through sharecropping and temporary loans of land in the villages concerned.

⁷ For a discussion of this specific method—what I call a 'three-generation perspective'—which I used in my research in Cameroon and Bénin, see Ouden (1986, 1989, 1990, 1991).

⁸ In the 'lineages' studied the percentage of landless agricultural labourers among people living in Houé was 51 per cent (thirty-five out of sixty-eight men), in Komihoué 10 per cent (nine out of ninety-one men) and in Adjôhoué 0 per cent (none out of 124 men). For women the picture was the same: in Houé, many; in Komihoué, very rare; in the families studied in Adjôhoué I did not come across any paid female agricultural labourers.

⁹ It may be possible that, in the Dogbo-Tota region, strict authority relations within Ehoué-Adja families, their thrift and their industry were also influenced by the 'frontier' mentality of a minority group aiming at emancipation. These relatively recent immigrants started with nothing but their own labour power in this territory dominated by Dogbo Adja and had to strain every nerve to better their position. Again, both the Ehoué of Komihoué village and those of the Koffihoué ward were established on land which belonged to Dogbo-Adja 'lineages' of Houé village.

¹⁰ To put it in a functionalist way, the economic importance of a woman to her husband is reflected in the amount of the bridewealth. This is often between 200,000 CFA francs and 300,000 CFA francs among the Ehoué and about 100,000 CFA francs among the Dogbo Adja. The Chikpi of Adjôhoué even say that it is often no more than 'a few drinks'. Here I leave out of consideration the expense a man incurs when a member of his wife's family

dies. The CFA franc exchange rate (Ffr 1 = CFA fr 50) against the French franc was fixed until January 1994.

¹¹ The structure of the Kpèkpè enterprise reminds us of Duffield's analyses of Sudanese entrepreneurs. See Kennedy (1988–90: 178): 'These are not organised in the style of Asian firms where several relatives participate directly in running the same firm together. But they are family businesses in the sense that each relative runs his own branch of the increasingly diversified and yet integrated network of enterprises, all of which were originally financed from the profits earned by the original firm.'

¹² Long and his group of scholars regularly point to the importance of non-commoditised relationships for commodity relations in strategies of survival or even expansion (e.g. Long, 1986: 23; Ploeg, 1991: 99–100).

¹³ See Fanou (1992: 194) for comparable problems in transport.

¹⁴ Compare Kennedy (1988–90: 175). Speaking of entrepreneurs, he writes, 'Investment in children's education has almost certainly provided the most widely used and significant avenue through which one generation has sought to bestow advantages on the next in recent times'.

¹⁵ Fanou (1992: 146, 163, 266–8) shows too for the villages he studied in the centre of the Ehoué-Adja region that accumulators, specialising primarily in agriculture, use the labour of as many wives, children and dependants as can be mobilised. He also stresses the strict discipline demanded by the 'charismatic' (to use his term) heads of extended households.

¹⁶ For the same strategy of getting information about land for sale see Fanou (1992: 163).

¹⁷ Compare Kennedy (1988–90: 177). Discussing the case of Hausa merchants in northern Nigeria, he writes, 'Here, sons, nephews or apprentice-clients . . . do derive a number of concrete benefits from periods of employment in their patron's firms: commercial experience, the opportunity to establish a wide range of business contacts and the chance to earn the trust of the local trading community. In addition, there is the possibility of receiving substantial loans or gifts to invest in their own enterprise which they can build up slowly whilst remaining partially under the protection of the original firm.'

¹⁸ Compare Kennedy (1988–90: 154): 'Some proprietors who own very small firms may find it necessary to employ immediate family members or more distant kinsmen. Such employees can often be paid very low wages and expected to forgo the demand for the proper terms of service normally anticipated—though not necessarily received—by non-family workers. . . . these kinds of employee relationships often bring disadvantages: an unwillingness to co-operate, the risk of pilfering, the 'withdrawal' of labour as soon as the owner is absent from the premises, low productivity and probably a general lack of discipline, especially on the part of kinsmen.'

¹⁹ Compare Hart (1975: 31): 'Some tried to hide their wealth, by making highly covert investments and resisting all forms of personal display . . .'

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ABSTRACT

In the rural Adja region of south-west Bénin there is a labour problem. People who want to expand their businesses need cheap and reliable labour, but such labour is difficult to find and to manage. The sort of 'big men' known as *alo-su amè dji*—those mainly interested in investing in and dominating people—would like to keep up the appearance of being a 'big man' with many people under their control, but they

cannot avoid the modern temptation of aspiring to personal wealth. Their style of management is to use mainly domestic labour, yet they face problems as the young begin to distrust the intentions of their household heads: the latter are suspected of looking after their own interests, while their followers doubt whether they will get a fair share of the assets when there are so many of them in a large family. Furthermore, sons and dependants find a long, very low-paid 'apprenticeship' increasingly unacceptable.

There is growing awareness of the difficulties of working with domestic labour and of the splintering effect of redistributing assets between a great many people. A small but growing number want accumulation for themselves and a limited number of descendants. This new style is associated with the sort of accumulators called *eho wu amè*, people who try to maximise financial gain. They work with much less family than hired labour (and prefer a much lower rate of polygyny). But hired labour at economic rates is not easy to find and there are organisational problems.

By offering a highly ethnographic and actor-oriented account the article shows that problems of labour management have to be taken seriously—especially where wage labour remains problematic yet the old style of controlling domestic labour no longer works, or only partly works, in the face of commercialisation, monetisation and the demand for higher living standards. Though the focus is primarily on farming, the argument applies equally to trade and transport businesses.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans la région rurale du sud-ouest Bénin il y a un problème de main d'oeuvre: ceux qui veulent étendre leurs entreprises ont besoin d'une main d'œuvre sûre, loyale et bon marché, ce qui est difficile à trouver et à gérer. Le genre de 'big men' que l'on présente ici comme *alo-sum amè dji*, des hommes qui s'intéressent surtout à investir dans les gens et à les dominer, voudraient avoir et garder l'apparence de 'big man' en contrôlant beaucoup de gens, mais ne peuvent éviter les tentations des temps modernes et ils aspirent à un accroissement de leur richesse personnelle. Dans leur façon de faire, ils veulent surtout utiliser la main d'oeuvre domestique et sont de plus en plus confrontés à des problèmes, car les jeunes gens sont de plus en plus sceptiques quant aux intentions des chefs de leurs ménages: ces accumulateurs sont soupçonnés de n'être intéressés que par leur propre bien-être, et leurs dépendants doutent qu'il y ait un partage équitable entre les nombreux membres des grandes familles dans le processus de la redistribution. De toutes façons, fils et autres dépendants sont de plus en plus réticents à demeurer dans un 'apprentissage' de longue durée, période au cours de laquelle beaucoup d'entre eux considèrent leur niveau de vie trop bas.

Nous constatons une prise de conscience de plus en plus croissante non seulement des difficultés à travailler avec de la main d'oeuvre domestique, mais également de l'effet dispersant d'une redistribution entre un grand nombre de gens. Une minorité, mais probablement croissante, de gens veulent de l'accumulation, non seulement pour eux-mêmes mais aussi pour un nombre restreint de descendants. On associe cette nouvelle façon de faire à des types d'accumulateurs *eho wu amè* des gens qui tentent de maximiser les profits financiers. Ici, bien évidemment, nous constatons également une grande hétérogénéité. Il ne va pas de soit que tous les gens de cette catégorie aient adopté ce mode dès le début de leur carrière. Dans ce mode d'accumulation, les gens travaillent avec un nombre plutôt réduit de main d'oeuvre familiale (un taux de polygamie beaucoup plus réduit) et engagent de la main d'oeuvre salariée. Comme je l'ai indiqué, une main d'oeuvre salariée qui coûte moins qu'elle ne produit n'est pas facile à trouver et entraîne des problèmes spéciaux d'organisation.

Cette analyse très ethnographique et orientée-vers-les-acteurs montre clairement

que le problème de la gestion de la main d'oeuvre doit être prise au sérieux dans cette partie de l'Afrique, et probablement dans beaucoup d'autres régions, où l'ancien mode d'accumulation et d'utilisation de stratégie avec la main d'oeuvre domestique non-marchande n'est plus adapté, ou seulement partiellement, aux processus de marchandisation, de monétarisation et d'accroissement du standard de vie désiré, régions où travailler avec de la main d'oeuvre salariée est aussi problématique.